

June 1, 1958

Dear Syd:

The clippings on the Fenner-Webb tragedy came in just a few days ago. We were just aghast, as who could help but be. I hope the Webb girl came out of it without too many scars, and I hardly dare ask how the Fenners have stood up under the blow.

We still get the Age Saturday edition, but none of this happened to be in it.

We don't have to tell you what the rut is like: we've been in the groove some time now, but have been very pleased the last couple of months to have Cavalli working with us, which keeps us reasonably busy. We should be just settled down reasonably well when (according to plans) we'll be off for the Stockholm Congress. We're trying to see whether we can manage any vacation out of it. We'll be away all of August.

The bit of ~~work~~ that Gus Nossal and I did together has created more of a stir here than I would have expected; a short note on it has just come out in Nature.

The last few months, I've spent some time not altogether unsuccessfully trying to stir up some considered scientific interest in the microbiology of the planets, hoping that we can evolve some plans to be ready in time to prevent the loss of a unique opportunity by inadvertent contamination. I will be surprised if there isn't a probe to the moon within the next six or twelve months-- the Russian rockets would have the power capability now, and a good chance for the guidance at least for a hard landing, and I don't think the US program is as far behind as you might think from the actual orbitings to date. When the hardware is fully developed, during the next year to five years, there'll be a tremendous scramble, and it may be too late by then to lay the proper groundwork for scientific investigation. I haven't been able to get too far among microbiologists just yet to think soberly and seriously about this, but perhaps far enough. The Airforce has announced its adherence to a conservative policy a propos contamination of the moon, which is the least promising of celestial targets for microbiology (though there's still an outside chance there of a test for Arrhenius' biospores.) The distance, in terms of technique, between a soft landing on the moon and on Mars is not very much. Dean Cowie and I have written a paper on "Moon Dust" and its biochemical and microbiological interest, which should be in print very shortly in Science.

How are you coming along with the new Building?

Could I ask you to see that we eventually get a copy of Discovery II?

We're looking forward to seeing Bruce at Montreal, and later on in Madison, and of course Maggie Blackwood will be here this fall too, so we can wait till then to get some of the latest. All our best,

Syd: I'm still very much interested in your super-autoclave. Can you see that I get specifications? Can it be adapted to 115 or to 220 volts? Is there a demonstration model anywhere in the US at the present time? Have you made any plans for US distribution?